

Ojibwe and Settler Space: The Temporal Influence of Creation Stories on Tribal Gynocentrism

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Abstract— *Ojibwe creation stories constitute the central epistemological framework of Anishinaabe ceremonial traditions. The stories are encoded with ancestral epistemic insights necessary for the continuum of Indigenous American tribal traditions in settler-dominated America. The application of Eurocentric interpretative paradigms erases the complex epistemic multidimensionality associated with the stories. The paper unearths central epistemic insights from the creation stories rooted in Indigenous gynocentrism. The paper establishes a crucial epistemic connection between Anishinaabe tribal cultures and the Indigenous woman. Through a tribal feminine epistemic lens, the paper also establishes the relational interconnections within space, time, and the mother deities in the formation of tribal realities contradistinctive to colonial simulations of reality.*



Keywords— *Sky-Woman, Gynocentric, Ojibwe, Anishinaabe, Grandmother Moon.*

I. GYNOCENTRIC EPISTEMOLOGICAL DERIVATIONS FROM THE OJIBWE RE-CREATION STORY

The oral narrative begins with Sky-Woman falling on the Earth subsumed by a flood. Sky-woman is seeking land as she is about to give birth. A sea-turtle inverts itself so that its body functions as bedding for Sky-Woman to give birth on. With the help of the muskrat, Sky-Woman obtains a patch of soil. She breathes into the soil which results in the re-formation of land. The Earth is re-created through the breath of Sky-Woman. Sky-Woman gives birth to the Anishinaabe. Sky-Woman and the sea turtle merge into an island, which becomes the home of the Anishinaabe tribe.

The Ojibwe re-creation story constitutes a central aspect of the Anishinaabe cosmological framework. The Ojibwe re-creation narrative is encoded with primary epistemological insights. These ancestral knowledge and insights are orally transmitted across linear space and time, which results in the spiralic interconnection amongst the Indigenous Anishinaabe tribe perceived to occupy the past, present, and future simultaneously. Within the mythic

framework of the Anishinaabe creation stories “and the mythopoeic vision,” the “past, present, and future” with “ancestors, contemporaries and descendants” are fundamentally one. Through the narration of creation stories, the “conscious and unconscious are united through the magic of symbolic progression”, mediating the transmission of “indirect memories and ancestral insights not raised to conscious articulation” and resulting in a metaphysical and transcendent landscape that temporally “incorporates both the near and far” (Allen 117). The first epistemological insight rooted in the Ojibwe re-creation story is represented through the primacy of the Indigenous feminine deity—Sky-Woman.

The potent primacy of native femininity is illustrated through the function of Sky-Woman in creating life and the Earth. The birth of the Anishinaabe and the reformation of the Earth signifies the originary movement of time, and the birth of the biota begins with a celestial Indigenous woman. The Earth is flooded in the genesis of the Ojibwe re-creation story. All Anishinaabe oral narratives centered on the recurring creation of the Earth

invariably begin with an “ecological cataclysm” that has subsumed biotas. The cyclic mechanism “initiates change by killing a society that has outlived its life cycle.” The stories always begin with the flood and ends with the formation of a new Indigenous society atop its preceding counterpart. In this way, the Anishinaabe creation narratives highlight the cyclical nature of life and death, emphasizing the delicate balance between Indigenous communities and the natural world.

The “ecological destructive forces” represent “significant points of change” in the iterative formation of Indigenous communities, across space and time further signified through the temporal recurrence of creation cycles (Killsback 140). The Native American conception of temporality, which is spiralic and consists of interconnecting circles that bind the past, present, and future, is best illustrated through the Indigenous term—“Kobade”, which refers to “a link in the chain” that temporally binds Indigenous communities’ “great grandparents and great grandchildren,” along with the multiple temporal connections “between generations, nations, states of being, and individuals” generated through the oral tradition (Simpson 8). The cyclical nature of Indigenous time symbolized by the spiralic temporal model and concepts like “Kobade,” allows the continuous renewal of communities and their connection to the past, present, and future.

The creation story and its iterations, continually generated and iterated through oral narratives, teach Indigenous listeners about the originary ancestral knowledge, “coded and transmitted through complex networks”, and remind them that their bodies are networked vessels, constellations across time and space, connected to a universe of nations and beings, encoded with “everything they need to know”, guided by the overarching Anishinaabe epistemic framework, or “Nishnaabewin” (Simpson 21). The temporal cycle is a tripartite mechanism that represents—creation, destruction, and re-creation. The ecological disaster in the Ojibwe re-creation story in the form of the flood, represents destruction or the end of the preceding cyclic temporal event. The new temporal event and its cyclic progression is initiated by an Anishinaabe feminine deity.

The overarching presence of Indigenous femininity in Ojibwe creation stories suggests that Anishinaabe tribal epistemologies are primarily gynocentric. “Indigenous Americans base their social systems on ritual, spirit-centered, and woman-focused world views” (Allen 2). Pre-colonial Indigenous American societies, both “woman-based” and “woman-centered” are “bound to ritual” and maintain gynocentric ritual traditions

“based on spiritual understandings than on economic or political ones” (Allen 195). A key aspect of these tribal gynocratic societies is the allowance of both genders to “function positively within the social order” (Allen 3). The Ojibwe tribal framework is characterized by their belief in the potency of Native American women, represented through their ability to create life and foster the ecological conditions essential for the survival of tribal communities.

Native American tribes, aware that their existence as collective individuals and communities “came to them from the Grandmothers”, a term referring to the originary ritual source of creation, continue to acknowledge even after European contact, their existence is borne out of a woman “to the present” (Allen 200). The Ojibwe, for instance, reiterate and celebrate this central fact of tribal Native American existence through their mythic discourses, ritual traditions, and associated ceremonial cycles.

The notion of equating the feminine form with the creation act, extending beyond the biological association of womanhood with the creation of life, is fundamental in Indigenous thought. The woman, as the fundamental baseboard in the creation of everything, embodies “thought, memory, instinct, tradition, and medicine or sacred power”. She is also “ritual,

ceremony, food, and shelter”, functioning as “the ways by which these are developed.” This rich understanding of the feminine as the source of creation underscores the deep reverence and respect that Indigenous cultures have for women and their essential role in the continuity of life and culture.

The Indigenous woman is revered as “the bringer, teacher, and creator” (Allen 264), with the epistemological orientation of oral stories shaped by Anishinaabe feminine deities and Ojibwe women storytellers who sustain the oral tradition. In Anishinaabe cultures, the female shaman, or medicine woman, is entrusted with narrating creation stories, drawing her authority from “the ceremonial power of dream or vision”, which mediates the transmission of ancestral knowledge to present-day Indigenous listeners. Tribal societies and their creation are epistemically rooted in “the living presence of the dreamer among the people” (Allen 205), whose ability to envision Indigenous realities generates a life force embodied in songs, dances, ritual objects, and garments created by women, but primarily sustained through the oral tradition.

The female shaman across collective Native American cultures, is entrusted with the ceremonial duty “of lifting the burden of colonialism by visioning new realities,” (Simpson 34) devoid of European epistemological and colonial influences. The primacy of Indigenous women within the Anishinaabe epistemological and cosmological

framework, is not only equated with their biological ability to give birth. Indigenous American women are interpreted as the originary basis of tribal epistemes, and are responsible for both the creation and preservation of tribal knowledge. According to collective Native American mythic discourses, “the Grandmothers created the firmament, the Earth, and all the spirit beings in it”. In the Anishinaabe creation stories, the grandmother constructs are represented through Earth Woman, Grandmother Moon and Sky Woman respectively.

The feminine deities bring forth creation “by thinking into being, the Women, or the Woman, from whom the people sprang”, with these women, conceived by the grandmother deities, embodying thought and generating the people and all orders of existence, thereby shaping societal structures and practices such as “the laws, the sciences, agriculture, and social institutions” (Allen 200). All of which stems from the grandmother deities, without whom the act of creation is nullified. Native Americans in the present continue to “recognize the deity as female, and she is known as Thought Woman, for it is understood that the primary creative force is thought”. The Indigenous notion of thought is synonymous with epistemic creation.

It is “pre-potent power” that bestows the Indigenous woman “the basic right to control and distribute goods, because she is the primary means of producing them” (Allen 255). The second epistemological insight in the Ojibwe re-creation story is evident in the ecological symbioses between Sky-Woman and the sea-turtle, with the ecological relational interaction between Sky-Woman and the muskrat. The centrality of Indigenous femininity within the critical framework of Anishinaabe epistemologies, is also acknowledged through the primary function of Indigenous women in ensuring the cyclic continuance of ecosystems. One of the primary epistemic insights transmitted to Indigenous audiences through oral stories is the grandmother deities’ act of “making and remaking the world in a generative fashion within Indigenous bodies engaged in accountable relationships with other beings”. The Ojibwe creation stories emphasize that creation arises from “the commingling combined in motion and movement” between feminine forces, non-human species, and “Indigenous bodies of both sexes in attached correlations with all aspects of creation” (Simpson 21). These narratives not only highlight the ecological interconnectedness intrinsic to Anishinaabe epistemologies but also underscore the indispensable role of Indigenous women as custodians of cultural and environmental continuity, ensuring the harmonious balance between humanity and the natural world.

The stories fundamentally convey diverse interpretations and realizations of an Ojibwe worldview, while mediating the audience’s understanding of “Anishinaabe realities” and their associated “epistemology, pedagogy, and conceptual meaning” (Simpson 152). Narrated within “oral contexts where contemporary Anishinaabe cultural practices are the norm” (Simpson 103), these stories contribute to the resurgence and revitalization of Native American intellectual traditions. The Anishinaabe epistemological framework is centrally praxis-oriented, wherein the application of ancestral teachings through movement and action outweighs abstraction and theorization. The cross-species interaction between Sky-Woman and the sea turtle, results in the re-creation of land and the Earth. This instance further suggests another aspect of the primacy that underlies Anishinaabe womanhood which lies in the ability of the feminine entity to transgress the biological distinctions, amongst diverse species to create and preserve Indigenous ecosystems devoid of hierarchical, patriarchal, and anthropocentric beliefs.

Such ecosystems maintained by Indigenous women are further characterized by a relational interconnectivity amongst the plant and animal species that constitute the biota. The grandmother deities in the Ojibwe creation myths do not conform to a Eurocentric field of perception that centrally associates womanhood with fecundity. The celestial deities in the creation stories produce off-springs without the intervention of the other sex. Grandmother Moon and Sky Woman are fundamentally creators of knowledge. Their collective act of thinking creation, sequentially leads to the ecological formation of biotas. Creation is achieved through the mutual interaction between the feminine deities and the animal species in the myths. This instance dispels notions of anthropocentrism characteristic of European mythic discourses.

Native American creation stories, rooted in the primacy of the feminine form, “are more often accretive than linear, more a-chronological than chronological,” emphasizing “harmonious relationships of all elements” (Allen 243), including “the plant nations, animal nations, rivers and lakes, cosmos, and neighboring Indigenous nations” (Simpson 8). Relationality implies a form of interconnection amongst the ecological species in the biota in which agency is equitably distributed. Native American epistemologies suggest that both ecological elements and the geological formations of the biota possess intelligible consciousness. The Native American “does not regard awareness of being as peculiar to one species” (Allen 60). Tribal American epistemologies stress on the equitable relatedness of all living organisms, with the complete

absence of individual agency attributed to a single species.

The Anishinaabe mode of living contrasts sharply with Eurocentric frameworks, as it does not depend on “institutionality to hold its structures” but instead emphasizes processes that foster “networked relationships”. The Ojibwe worldview is characterized by a relational interconnectivity among species, expressed through “a series of interconnected and overlapping algorithms that includes stories, ceremonies, and the land” (Simpson 23). In contrast, Eurocentric thought often adheres to a unidirectional and linear notion of time, which extends to the compartmentalization of knowledge into fixed, stationary branches. This division reflects a universalized assumption of Euro-Western centrality, underscoring a recurring linearity in its epistemological approach. “Because of a sense of relatedness to—instead of isolation from—what exists, the Indian assumes that this awareness is a natural by-product of existence itself” (Allen 60). This contrast highlights the fundamental differences in how knowledge, relationships, and existence are understood and organized, with Indigenous perspectives offering a more holistic and interconnected worldview.

Western epistemes are primarily oriented towards expanding such an assumption. Its universalized application across non-Western spheres of thought ensures the dominance of European knowledge over Indigenous worldviews. In synchronization with the relational interconnectivity imbued within Indigenous ecosystems, a similar asynchronous and a-chronological connectivity within Anishinaabe epistemes is present. Eurocentric epistemologies are “uni-dimensional, monolithic, excluding, and chronological,” with analytical methodologies that are “linear and fixed”, whereas tribal epistemologies, by contrast, are “multi-dimensional, a-chronological, and including”, characterized by requirements that are “accretive and fluid” and cannot be interpreted within the Western epistemic framework (Allen 244). Native American epistemes are interconnected “in complex non-linear forms” (Simpson 23). While Eurocentric epistemes are distinctly branched due to varying orientations and focus of study, Anishinaabe epistemes are relationally and collectively bound to one another. The symbioses within Sky-Woman, the sea-turtle, and muskrat indicates a shared agency amongst the feminine and other ecological species.

The application of Western epistemologies in the interpretation of the natural world results in the separation, classification, and categorization of ecological species. European epistemologies are also rooted in the anthropocentric assumption that solely and unequally situates intelligible agency within the colonialist-

patriarchal paradigm.

The Ojibwe re-creation story teaches Indigenous listeners that the re-formation of the Earth is the result of the relational interaction, and participation amongst all the ecological species with no one species claiming precedence over others. The Ojibwe stories comprise epistemic layers characterized by “a series of complex, interconnected cycling processes that makeup a nonlinear, overlapping emergent and responsive network of relationships that spirals across time and space” (Simpson 24). This holistic perspective challenges the fragmented, hierarchical approach of Western epistemologies, emphasizing instead a vision of interconnectedness and shared agency amongst all beings in the natural world. The stories are epistemically rooted in land as the creation myths narrate the formation of distinctly feminine biotas. Anishinaabe thought processes stems from land. The creation of land in the stories is the result of complex cyclical processes that highlight “the emergent properties of the natural world” (Simpson 91). The Ojibwe are collectively oriented towards aligning themselves with this worldview.

The Ojibwe are further inclined “to relate events and experiences to one another. Indigenous worldviews do not organize perceptions or external events in terms of dualities or priorities, nor do they segregate causal relationships “in hierarchical and dualistic terms” (Allen 59) or arrange events and phenomena within chronological contexts, which distinguishes them from tribal American communities. The feminine and other ecological constructs within the biota are homogeneously linked to one another. Sky-Woman's non-conformity of human-centrism represented through her transgression of the colonial division amongst species, indicates that Anishinaabe epistemologies function both independently and differently from Eurocentric epistemic perspectives.

Tribal American societies, with their accompanying “tribal consciousness and attendant social structures,” differ enormously from those of the Western world, and tribal realities can only be understood when researched within contexts distinctly Indigenous to each specific tribe, using paradigms that embody epistemologies rooted in that particular tribal community and its “tribal matrix” (Allen 247). The a-chronological interconnectivity amongst species in the oral stories and epistemes, is also synchronously reflected in the Anishinaabe conception of time. The relational interaction between Sky-Woman and the animal species ensures the continuance of the central aspect of Anishinaabe epistemological framework—land.

The Ojibwe epistemological framework is characterized by the intertwining of both “theory and

praxis”, which are generated through the continuous interaction with Indigenous territories and “Indigenous processes inherently physical, intellectual, and spiritual” (Simpson 23). Processes such as “mapping, storytelling, and continuation” function as means of asserting Indigenous presence in colonized areas and further mediate “the renunciation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (Simpson 196). Ceremonial practices, within the context of tribal realities, can be understood as the “ritual enactment of a specialized perception” linked to a cosmic relationship, while creation myths serve as a “prose record of that relationship” (Allen 61). The ceremony, with its attendant ritualistic practices such as “incantation, song, dance, and prayer,” functions as the central tribal tradition “from which all allied songs and stories are derived”, and its primary purpose “is to integrate” members of a specific tribal community across space, time, and through dimensions beyond the material. The Ojibwe epistemological framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of knowledge, ritual, and community, fostering a holistic understanding of existence that transcends colonial narratives and reasserts Indigenous ways of being.

The ceremony fuses “the individual with his or her fellows, the community of people with that of the other tribal clan societies, and the larger communal group with the worlds beyond this one” (Allen 62). The concept of communal kinship, which transcends the chronological branching of hereditary and lineage, is “the bedrock of tribal life” and “necessarily includes all beings that inhabit the tribe’s universe” (Allen 63). The ecological species in Indigenous biotas and celestial worlds across the spiralic spatiotemporal framework are also included in the perceptual system of the tribe. The Ojibwe oral tradition functions as the primary epistemic practice that reinforces the Indigenous cyclic conception of time through its transgression of linear time. The Indigenous cyclic spatial construct signifies the continuum orientation of creation.

The cycle represents recurrence of the central temporal events namely the destruction and re-creation of the Earth. The cyclic spatial construct permeates across all tribal American cultures, and symbolizes “cycles of creative energies, and continual processes that bring forth more life, creation and thinking”. Encoded in creation stories across tribal American societies is “the original instruction represented in the form of Indigenous resurgence” (Simpson 24). The emergence of Indigeneity through the narrative application of the oral stories further “create networks across time and space, and generates doorways for new theoretical understandings to emerge” (Simpson 195). The act of storytelling is integral to the continuation of Indigenous societies is “connected to homelands, and is crucial to the cultural and political

resurgence of Indigenous nations” (Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, T’lakwadzi 137). The land ensures the cyclic continuance of Anishinaabe tribal communities and epistemologies. The third epistemic insight derived from the re-creation story is the function of Indigenous land in the formation of the Anishinaabe pedagogical framework. “The land, Aki, is both context and process” (Simpson 151). The land—wholly feminine—functions as both the literal and metaphysical “foundation of Indigenous and Anishinaabe thought processes,” (Simpson 213) and is responsible for the formation of “nature developed thought systems that are process and context oriented” (Simpson 91). The concept of communal kinship, which transcends the chronological branching of hereditary and lineage, is “the bedrock of tribal life” and “necessarily includes all beings that inhabit the tribe’s universe” (Allen 63). This interconnectedness between land, kinship, and thought systems highlights the foundational role of land in shaping the Indigenous worldview, where all beings are seen as part of an integrated and dynamic web of relationships.

It is Sky-Woman who gives birth to the Anishinaabe and turns herself into an island. These instances denote the Anishinaabe interprets land as feminine. “The land is mother. All symbols in the creation stories are connected with woman-ness, and through her to the universal feminine principle of creation, while the land and the people constitute a unitary whole, which “is the fundamental idea that permeates American Indian tribal existence” (Allen 119). The Earth is the First Woman and she “designates the beginning of the animal world, the plant world and human beings” (Watts 27). The Indigenous interpretation of femininity within a tribal Anishinaabe framework, is rooted in the association of womanhood with the creation of thought, tribal thought-processes, and cosmologies. The Ojibwe woman is the “center of the psychic or spiritual unity of her people. She is perceived as the hub of the wheel. It is by virtue of her gift, her ability, that “the people live and are a people” (Allen 204), and through her presence, “the people are connected to one another in ways more than language, culture, or proximity can assure”, with Sky-Woman functioning independently in re-creating the Earth, free from the interference of settler-colonial notions of hierarchy and patriarchy.

It is Sky-Woman's conscious exercising of this intelligible agency within an Indigenous spatial dimension, devoid of Eurocentric epistemic influences that results in the material manifestation of land. The land in the re-creation story is both the product of Sky-Woman's intelligible consciousness and possesses the same conscious intelligence, since Sky-Woman transforms herself into land distributing her agency to other ecological constructs. Colonial epistemologies interpret land as a non-living and

stationary capitalist resource, utilized for the expansion of existing settler structures. Anishinaabe worldview interprets land as an extension of independent, intelligent feminine agency, and as the source of Indigenous epistemes. The ceremonial narration and enactment of the stories bridges “the gap between isolate human being and lonely landscape” (Allen 120). In response to “the dispossessive forces of settler colonization in both historical and current manifestations,” the ceremonial stories are enacted “to reconnect Indigenous bodies to land” and protect Indigenous knowledge systems associated with the land (Coulthard Simpson 254). The reciprocal relationship between the land and its tribe generates the Indigenous processes, and knowledge responsible for the cultural continuum of the tribe.

The narration of the creation stories ensures the transmission of tribal and ancestral teachings, on the cultural and epistemic significance of land across chronological time. The oral tradition also functions in preserving epistemic teachings rooted in land to ensure the cyclic continuation of Indigenous American sovereignty, in the present centrally oriented towards the expansion of settler-colonial and capitalist structures.

“Anishinaabe conceptualizations of time and space present an ongoing intervention to linear thinking” (Simpson 152). The colonial structuring of time allows the chronological arrangement of sequential events where the past is negated, the present and future are causally oriented towards Euro-American expansion. The ceremonial enactment of the creation stories is “more than a linear revival of Indigenous cultures in the present”, as this resurgent act represents “a reconstitution of other parameters of sensing time and space that subvert dominant ways of knowing and being” (Martineau Ritskes 8). In this way, the Anishinaabe framework reclaims time and space as fluid and interconnected, offering a transformative challenge to the rigid, linear structures imposed by colonial ideologies.

The routes generated within colonized spatial dimensions through the ritualized creation of de-colonized spaces are represented through movement “in lines, words, performances and sounds that break through colonial enclosures to open spaces of imagination and creativity”, while the “ruptural potentiality” of the oral ceremonial tradition mediates the re-arrangement of causal temporality, embodying non-linear perceptions of time (Martineau Ritskes 10). Each narrative construct in the creation stories such as Sky-Woman, the sea-turtle, the muskrat, and the land with its formation represent central aspects of the Anishinaabe epistemic and theoretical framework. The presence of Sky-Woman, her act of

creating the Anishinaabe and re-creating the land, represents the predominant influence of gynocentric epistemes in the formation of tribal traditions and ritual practices. The presence of ecological species such as the sea-turtle and the muskrat, signify that intelligible agency is equally attributed to non-human species. The symbioses between the feminine and ecological constructs in the creation stories further indicate the primary function of non-human species, in determining the identities of tribal members in relation with specific animal species.

The totemic associations between Anishinaabe and animal species results in the formation of clan systems. The Anishinaabe tribal worldview interprets all non-human species as possessing intelligent agential awareness. Totemic clans are formed when individual tribal members are linked to specific animal species, rooted in a tribal understanding of a shared trait between the Anishinaabe and other ecological species. The arrangement and practice of the clan system in tribal societies function as “a way of intimately connecting people to animal nations” (Simpson 116). In this way, the Anishinaabe framework reclaims time and space as fluid and interconnected, offering a transformative challenge to the rigid, linear structures imposed by colonial ideologies.

Anishinaabe tribal societies are “profoundly influenced by the ecological world”, with their attendant social and political structures being informed by “ecological non-human species that exist across time and space” (Simpson 117). The ceremonial stories narrated by the female dreamer teaches her audience to “engage in a form of existence that generates a close relationship with the animal world, the ancestors and relations in the spirit world” (Simpson 158). Totemic clan formations are also rooted in the tribal belief that all degrees of creation are homogeneously linked to one another, since they stem from a common creator—“Gizhe Mnidoo” (Watts 21). The relational symbioses within Sky-Woman, sea-turtle, and the muskrat results in the creation of land. The symbioses instance in the re-creation story indicates that ecological non-human species, also play a significant role in the formation and preservation of Anishinaabe knowledge. Totemic clans within a tribal society “have responsibilities to a particular geographic region of the territory, and their relationship with that region is a source of knowledge, spirituality, and sustenance”, while specific tribal members associated with a clan are also required to “maintain and nurture a special relationship with their clan animal” (Simpson 33). The re-creation story begins with the Earth covered in flood. The oral story ends with the creation of land and the formation of ‘Turtle Island’.

The overarching influence of these constructs is

primarily represented through the transformation of the Earth, from an inhospitable planet to the abode of the Anishinaabe. Settler epistemologies insist on a dichotomous distinction between the elements—soil and water. The Anishinaabe perspective insists on a unitary association amongst all aspects of the biota, irrespective of the epistemic divisions mediated by Western sciences. Tribal societies “perceive their world in a unified-field fashion,” that broadly varies from the “single-focus perception that generally characterizes Western masculinist, monotheistic modes of perception” (Allen 244).

The form of agency that enables non-human constructs to function as conscious and independent actors within an ecosystem is referred to as “place-thought” (Watts 21). ‘Thought’ translates to a form of consciousness normatively denied to non-human actors through the application of Eurocentric epistemologies. ‘Thought’ refers to the intelligible capability of creating individual epistemic spaces independent of settler-colonial influences. ‘Place’ translates to the manifestation of a material plane through the application of agency exercised by non-human actors that functions as an epistemic space situated within the Indigenous tribal framework.

“Place-Thought” constitutes a distinctive aspect of Anishinaabe and Native American epistemologies that situates all forms of non-human actors—ecological and celestial—as central in the creation and continuance of Indigenous knowledge, with the two archetypical iterations of the creation narrative that embody the Indigenous concept of “place-thought” being the fifth and sixth fires of creation, the fifth of which is characterized by the celestial formation of Ojibwe epistemes by the universal creator or “Gizhe-Mnidoow”. The sixth fire is characterized by the creation of First Woman or the Earth.

The creation stories provide an alternate interpretation of the how the universe came to be, vastly different from the European interpretation of the same temporal event. While the biblical account of creation is characterized by the treatment of space as an isolated and exclusive dimension, the tribal creation stories “describe a theoretical understanding of the world,” through the unitary application of both place and thought. Tribal teachings reminds us that both spatial and temporal dimensions are singularly entwined, and is manifested through the celestial association between the feminine deities and ecological species. While Eurocentric creation discourses establish the hegemonic supremacy of the European male form in the creation of the world, tribal narratives centered on creation emphasize the symbiosis between “the spiritual and feminine”, with tribal American

accounts of creation being broadly characterized by “the common intersections of the female, animals, the spirit world, the mineral and plant world” (Watts 21). Tribal societies within Indigenous biotas are characterized by interactions within these intersecting worlds than singular human-centric interactions. The celestial-feminine and other non-human ecological actors in the re-creation story also influences its narrative orientation.

The over-arching influence of these constructs on the narrative trajectory of the re-creation story is represented through the function of “place-thought” (Watts 21) in the geological formation of Indigenous territories. Its application is evident in the triangulated interaction amongst the feminine and ecological actors, such as First Woman, Sky Woman, and Grandmother Moon, who represent Indigenous territories as “the literal embodiment of the feminine principle”. The application of “place-thought” is “an extension of her circumstance and communication with the water and animals—her agency”; through the symbiotic interaction with the turtle, Sky-Woman “is not only able to create land but becomes territory itself”, thereby becoming the foundational epistemic basis upon which tribal societies across time are built. This interconnectedness of the feminine, ecological, and epistemic realms within the re-creation story underscores the integral role of land, agency, and relationality in shaping the ongoing existence and knowledge systems of Indigenous societies.

Tribal societies as a whole are “demarcated by territory which is an extension of Sky Woman’s original circumstance”, with her being “present in the relationships between the intersecting dimensions” (Watts 23). The relational interaction within these constructs—through the application of “place-thought” (Watts 21)—determines the epistemic orientation of the oral stories. The re-creation of land signifies the production of Indigenous epistemes cyclically transmitted through the narrative mechanism of the oral tradition.

II. GYNOCENTRIC EPISTEMOLOGICAL DERIVATIONS FROM THE OJIBWE SIXTH ORDER OF CREATION STORY

The influence of the non-human constructs in the creation of ‘Turtle Island’ signifies the epistemic impact of these constructs, extends beyond the narrative confines of the oral stories. The celestial-feminine and animal agents in the oral stories are not stationary elements. They function as embodiments of Anishinaabe cosmologies. The narrative sequences that constitute the sixth order of creation are as follows. Of the seven orders of creation, the sixth order is significant as this specific creation story outlines the birth

of the first woman who is also referred to as Earth Woman. In the fifth order of creation, “Gizhe-Mnidoo” transmits all his knowledge into seeds, and in the sixth order, the first woman in the form of the Earth is created; however, the Earth is barren, and it is “Gizhe-Mnidoo” who mediates the symbiosis between the seeds encoded with his knowledge and Earth Woman (Watts 21). Life is created on Earth through the formation of Indigenous biotas for the habitation of all life forms.

The specific narrative instance in the sixth order of creation story that represents the primacy of Indigenous femininity, is the symbioses between Earth Woman and the seeds of knowledge. The seeds encoded with the originary basis of Indigenous cosmologies, centered on the creation of the universe and the Earth represents Anishinaabe epistemologies. “Those seeds carried all of the creative energy, all of the thoughts and the potential for all of life. Then Gzhwe Mnidoo made Mother the Earth. The very first woman created was a woman that would give birth to all of Creation” (Simpson 38). It is the symbiotic interaction between Earth Woman and the seeds that constitutes the originary creation of life. The merging between the two Indigenous constructs signifies that Anishinaabe knowledge, are epistemically rooted in and around the spatial orientation of the feminine form. Prior to the symbioses the Earth is devoid of life forms. After the conjoining with the seeds of knowledge, Indigenous ecosystems are created that houses all forms of life.

“Gzhwe Mnidoo looked upon Creation. Her life blood flowing below and above the ground. Her veins and her lifeblood, her bloodlines give life to all. She was created first—the first woman” (Simpson 38). These ecosystems constitute Indigenous lands and territories created upon a ground universally interpreted as feminine, within the framework of Anishinaabe cosmologies. Both the creation stories on Earth Woman and Sky-Woman, teaches Indigenous listeners the land is spatially and epistemically feminine. “From her breast came all there is—the winged of the air, the swimmers, the four legged, the plants, the crawlers, the trees, and the seas that moved across the land” (Simpson 39). Anishinaabe cosmological frameworks “are not an abstraction but a literal and animate extension of Sky Woman and First Woman’s thoughts” (Watts 22). The primary epistemic insight derived from the sixth order of creation story, is the Indigenous Anishinaabe interpretation of duality.

The simultaneous presence of dual and contradictory constructs constantly recurs in the sixth order of creation. The first instance of such a duality is evident in the parallel presence of “Gizhe Mnidoo” and Earth Woman, where, according to Anishinaabe cosmological accounts of

the originary creation of the universe, “Gizhe Mnidoo” is normatively described as male (Watts 21). This duality within the creation story reflects the foundational Anishinaabe belief in the interconnectedness of all life and the simultaneous coexistence of masculine and feminine forces in shaping both the physical and epistemic landscape of the world.

There are similar Ojibwe mythic accounts that describe ‘the Great Creator’ as unisexual. In the sixth order of creation story, the first instance of duality is represented through the binary distinction in gender as seen in the case of “Gizhe Mnidoo” and Earth-Woman. The symbioses between contradictory constructs constitute another recurring narrative theme in Anishinaabe cosmologies. The symbiotic association between varying Indigenous constructs evident in the Ojibwe creation stories, represents the unitary and homogeneous epistemic associations within the collective Anishinaabe cosmological knowledge. In the oral re-creation story, the relational symbioses between the feminine form and the animal constructs represent the singularity that underlies Ojibwe epistemologies. In the sixth order of creation story, a similar instance of epistemological homogeneity is evident in the symbiotic interaction between Earth Woman and “Gizhe Mnidoo,” (Watts 21) in the form of the seeds encoded with his knowledge. The dichotomous distinction in gender characteristic of Anishinaabe cosmologies varies with respect to the normative binary division in gender characteristic of Eurocentric epistemologies. The Eurocentric epistemological framework is characterized by masculinist, hierarchical, and anthropocentric notions.

Implicit within the gender binary construct in the Eurocentric theoretical framework, is the designation of the woman as the ‘weaker sex’ and the suggestion of superiority bestowed upon the male. The Eurocentric interpretation of the binary construct further implies an inequitable distribution in agency amongst the two sexes, with the male exercising greater agency and the situating of women within the masculinist-authoritarian paradigm. Indigenous feminine primacy constitutes a distinctive aspect of Anishinaabe cosmologies. The first woman or Earth Woman is created in the sixth fire of creation, and man is created in the seventh or final cycle of creation. That man is created after first woman and is born on the soil that represents first woman, suggests that man is dependent on and is by extension the child of first woman. “Original Man was the last to be created from the first woman. Gzhwe Mnidoo, having taken four parts of her body—soil, air, water, and fire—to mold a vessel, thereby reverses the normative supremacy associated with the ‘greater sex,’ nullifying hegemonic notions of gender, as “Gzhwe Mnidoo lowered him down to the Earth as he is the child

of great Mother. Anishinaabe touched and met his Mother” (Simpson 39). The symbiotic interaction between the celestial female and male entities in the sixth fire of creation story, denotes the equitable distribution of agency between both the sexes.

This instance further denotes the absence of hierarchical notions of gender as evident in the dual and mutualistic function of both feminine and masculine deities, in ensuring the cyclic continuance of Anishinaabe tribal cosmologies and other modes of knowledge. The seeds encoded with “Gizhe Mnidoo’s” (Watts 21) knowledge and its merging with the first woman, represents the sexual union between both the gender constructs. The act of creation that recurs in the oral stories represents the foundational basis of Anishinaabe epistemic and cosmological worldviews. The formation of Indigenous land and its temporal continuance constitutes the theoretical baseboard of the Anishinaabe tribal framework. The temporal recurrence of creation evident in multiple iterations of the oral stories on the genesis of Indigenous ecosystems, denotes the centrality of this specific temporal event in determining both the formation and orientation of Indigenous Anishinaabe knowledge. The creation of Anishinaabe epistemologies, cosmologies, and tribal traditions is ensured through the practice of the oral tradition. The unification between the dual genders and the resultant creation of the Earth in the sixth fire of creation story, signifies the point of temporal origin that functions as the basis of Anishinaabe ways of knowing and being. Another instance of duality is evident in the Anishinaabe interpretation of two Indigenous constructs, namely—Grandmother Moon and Grandfather Sun. The two Indigenous constructs are created in the third fire of creation. After the sixth order of creation is completed, a tripartite relational connection is established within the Sun, Moon, and the Earth. The Sun is interpreted as masculine.

The Moon and the Earth—Grandmother Moon and Earth Woman—are feminine. In the third fire of creation, the Anishinaabe interpretation of duality is represented through gender binary construct along with the dichotomy established between light and darkness. “This is the Creator’s Fire, Giizis, the Sun. Within that great circle was the partner to the Giizis, Grandmother the Moon. Dibiki-Giizis is the nighttime Sun who would give light in darkness”. Duality is established through the creation of the Sun and the Moon. “Grandmother Moon is the Grand woman of the universe who governs the seasonal cycles that renews all the life created” (Simpson 38). The genders are assigned to both the cosmological constructs, based on their degree of ability to shed light. The Sun is interpreted as masculine, since its ability to shed light results in the preservation of Earth Woman.

The Moon is interpreted as feminine, based on its similar ability to emit light at night to preserve the Indigenous ecosystems within Earth Woman. The relational interaction between the Sun and the Moon establishes the mutual dependency, between both the gender constructs in ensuring the preservation of Earth Woman. The interplay between binary constructs is also represented through the light/dark dichotomy. Within the critical framework of Anishinaabe tribal cosmologies, light is Indigenously interpreted as the source of Earth woman’s sustenance. The Anishinaabe interpretation of duality is primarily rooted in the third order of creation. If light functions as the giver of life and source of creation according to the Anishinaabe interpretation of duality in the third order of creation, then darkness represents the absence of creation. The interaction of Earth Woman with the masculine Sun and the feminine Moon, is also characterized by a relational dependency within the Indigenous constructs.

Indigenous listeners of the third and sixth orders of creation stories are reminded of the centrality that underlies the Indigenous feminine form, represented through the mutual function of the feminine constructs—Grandmother Moon and Earth Woman, in the cyclic creation and continuance of the Anishinaabe tribe and their native territories. The relational interconnection of Earth Woman with Grandmother Moon and Grandfather Sun teaches Ojibwe listeners in the present that their tribal traditions and rituals are characterized by an acknowledgment of these Indigenous constructs, and their participation in the formation of Anishinaabe tribal cosmologies and epistemologies.

III. CONCLUSION

The ongoing violence against Indigenous women in America sheds light on the need for the reclamation of lost gynocentric practices, and the resurgence of tribal feminine voices. The paper establishes a fundamental epistemic conception rooted in Indigenous femininity characteristic of Anishinaabe tribal culture. The paper addresses the vital role of Indigenous women in ensuring the continuance of tribal traditions in the colonized technoscientific present. The paper proves the feminine deities in the creation stories are animate extensions of tribal epistemologies crucial for the continuum of Indigenous tribes. The paper contributes to the continuing Indigenous efforts at challenging the epistemic dominance of Eurocentric thought processes, and its colonizing influence over Indigenous epistemic perspectives.

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